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ABSTRACT

The effects of differing and often opposing language policies on the sociolinguistic position of the Alsatian language are discussed. An attempt is made to show how the function and scope of Alsatian have been reduced, and how borrowings from French have created a dialect with unique characteristics. It has survived despite its lack of official status and has become a symbol of Alsatian ethnic identity. The primary area of focus is the dialect variety spoken in the city of Strasbourg. Alsatian, a German dialect spoken in Eastern France, is thought to have been influenced by alternating French and German dominance and concomitant differing language policies. Subjected to policies aimed at producing linguistic assimilation and uniformity, Alsatian has survived as an unwritten speech. Through intensive and prolonged exposure to French, it has incorporated numerous French borrowings that underwent characteristic phonological and morphological changes. More recently, a general trend toward regionalism in France and an upsurge of protest movements, aimed at defending the rights of minorities, have generated a revival of the dialect. (SW)

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A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC INQUIRY INTO LANGUAGE CHANGE: Alsatian, A Case Study

Marguerite Hessini

Abstract: Alternating French and German dominance, and concomitant differing language policies, have determined the sociolinguistic position of Alsatian, a German dialect, spoken in Eastern France. Subjected to policies aimed at producing linguistic assimilation and uniformity, Alsatian has survived as an unwritten speech and has become a symbol of ethnic identity. Through intensive and prolonged exposure to French, it has incorporated numerous French borrowings which underwent various characteristic phonological and morphological changes. More recently, a general trend toward regionalism in France and an upsurge of protest movements, aiming at defending the rights of minorities, have generated a revival of the dialect.[1]

Zwische zwei Stuehl bin ich gebore
m'r hett mich nit nooch min're Meinung g'fröjt.
Zwische zwei Stuehl sitz ich schun Johre
un hab ins s'Läre um mich rumgeluejt.[2]

A song from 'Cabaret Bonjour'
(E. Philipps, 1978:203)

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Repeated changes in political status and subsequent changes in official language policies have determined the sociolinguistic position of Alsatian, a German dialect spoken in Eastern France. The present study deals with the effects of differing and often opposing language policies, within a context of either German or French dominance. It will attempt to show how the function and scope of Alsatian have been reduced, and how borrowings from French have created a dialect with unique characteristics, which has survived despite its lack of official status and has become a symbol of Alsatian ethnic identity. In my analysis of French borrowings in Alsatian, I will deal primarily with the dialect variety spoken in the city of Strasbourg, of which I am a native.

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Geographical Setting and Historical Data

The province of Alsace covers an area about 200 km long and 40-45 km wide between the Rhine and the Vosges mountains. In the East it borders on West Germany, in the South on Switzerland. Alsace has about one and a half million inhabitants, of whom 400,000 live in Strasbourg, the provincial capital.

The following outline captures the main historical events which have affected Alsace over the centuries (Philipps 1975).

58 B.C. - 357 A.D.: Alsace was part of the Roman Empire.
5th.century: The Alemanni, Germanic tribes, invaded and settled in Alsace and northern Switzerland.
870 - 1648: Alsace was part of the Holy Roman Empire.
1648: Alsace became French under Louis XIV (treaties of Westphalia).
1871: Alsace was annexed by the German Empire after the defeat of Napoleon III. 50,000 Alsatians emigrated to France.
1918: End of World War I: Alsace became French after the defeat of Germany.
1920-30: Autonomist crisis in Alsace.
1939: Beginning of World War II: Evacuation of 746,000 Alsatians to the South-West of France.
1940 - 45: Alsace was annexed by the Third Reich after the capitulation of France in 1940.
1945: Alsace became French again after the defeat of Germany.

Political Implications

The historical facts mentioned above illustrate clearly that Alsace has been coveted by both the Germans and the French, who either call it German or want it to be French without any local particularism. Within a time-span of seventy-five years, between 1870 and 1945, Alsace changed political affiliation five times. On each of these occasions the province was compelled to change its official language. Moreover, after every political change, there was a population shift: emigration of those elements who refused to live under the new regime, immigration of monolingual speakers from the victorious country. In all the wars Alsace has always been on the losing side, and after each war has switched to the winning side. That situation creates a need, either genuinely felt or imposed, for dissociation with the previous power, which includes a rejection of the language of the prior regime, since language is interpreted as corresponding to political identity. And as French and German are always considered to be mutually exclusive, at any political change, the cultural and linguistic gains of the previous regime are either gradually or abruptly destroyed.

Present Language Situation

There are three components to the language situation. Alsatian, a basically unwritten German dialect, derived from the language spoken by the Alemanni who settled in Alsace in the fifth century, is spoken by almost 80% of the population. French is the official and prestige language, used exclusively in education, administration, court procedures, and all official proceedings. French is thus the dominant language in Alsace both

because of its exclusive use in major areas of public life and because of the cultural values associated with it. This confirms Weinreich's observations that "the greater utility of a language, or the extent to which it is actually used, is an easily measurable factor which serves to establish the dominance of one of two languages", and that "a further point on which one language may be designated as dominant is the bilingual's intellectual or esthetic appreciation of the literary culture which is expressed in that language" (Weinreich 1968:77,79). Standard German forms the third language component. After French and Alsatian, it is the most important language and has become the literary medium of the unstandardized Alsatian dialect. German also allows the speaker access to the adjacent German speaking world. It also helps maintain the contact with the older generation educated before World War I. It is still widely used in church services, mainly by the Lutherans. Furthermore, with the development of the Common Market, German has gained renewed importance in Alsace.

The Alsatian dialect may be characterized as follows. Over the centuries, it has coexisted and maintained itself beside French and German, as an unwritten dialect with no official status and without institutional means for perpetuating it. Within a context of drastic political upheavals and language changes, it has been the only constant element, the only tangible continuum. It has increasingly diverged from standard German through long periods of French dominance, when it lacked direct contact with standard German and other German dialects, and thus did not partake in the evolution of the German language. As a result of deliberate language policies, its function has been increasingly reduced, and it has evolved into a number of closely related, mutually understandable dialects, a sign of the unstandardized state of Alsatian. Through intensive and prolonged exposure to French, it has incorporated numerous French borrowings. This latter aspect of the dialect will be dealt with more thoroughly later on in this study.

Alsatian is spoken by four-fifths of the population. Considering that there has been a considerable influx of monolingual French speakers since World War 2 this percentage is quite high. At the same time, there is a trend toward decreasing dialect usage, as shown by a comparison of the census of 1946 indicating 91% dialect speakers, with that of 1962 indicating 82% (Maugué 1970:183).

Three main trends are apparent in dialect use. There is, first, the contrast between rural and urban areas. In the former, Alsatian is spoken more widely and predominantly. In the latter, there is a greater influx of monolingual French speakers, who rarely attempt to learn the dialect, and a concentration of highly educated Alsatians who choose not to use the dialect for reasons of prestige. The second contrast is between the upper classes and the masses. Among the latter the dialect is predominant, and used consistently in informal situations, in the home, and in everyday life. In contrast, French is often used exclusively by the upper classes and civil servants as a status symbol. This is a direct consequence of the place reserved officially to French, which is the sole means of instruction on all levels of education, and the only language used in administration, the law courts, and all areas of public life. The third aspect is the contrast between the older and the younger generation. Alsatians born after 1940 tend to be more thoroughly Frenchified. They often

are not fluent in standard German as their elders are, but generally still speak the dialect informally. They face the alternative of either renouncing their identity by accepting increased assimilation into French, or opting for dialect usage. Without knowledge of standard German, the dialect speaker is restricted in his means of literary expression and lacks access to the German-speaking world.

Most Alsatians do not question their attachment to France nor the priority of French, but stubbornly cling to their dialect which allows them to have some degree of identity, independent of the political status of the province. Rather than a political minority, Alsatians thus form a linguistic minority in France, since in the land they have occupied for centuries, they are using a German dialect, whose literary expression, standard German, is not recognized as an official language by the state. As Héraud (1963:245) pointed out: "Constitue une minorité linguistique toute population qui, établie traditionnellement sur le territoire qu'elle occupe, use d'un dialecte, ou d'une langue, autre que la langue ou les langues officielles de l'Etat."[3]

Language Policies

After every political change, stringent language policies were implemented in Alsace to insure the preeminence of the official language, to institutionalize its dominance, and guarantee its expansion, which in turn served to reduce the scope and function of dialect use. "The language resources of a community may become subject to government manipulation, i.e., to economic and political issues and pressures, leading to differential selection of the language resources and affecting changes in language . . . use" (Bount and Sanches 1977:8). And as stated by Rubin and Jernudd (1972:xii), "language planning is 'deliberate' language change". The current language situation in Alsace is a case in point.

Language policies in Alsace are based on assumptions regarding the dialect, and on principles deemed of national interest. Although Alsatian is widely used in Alsace, and though standard German can have a literary form of expression, it is not considered a language by the authorities, and thus has never been assigned any official status. From this it follows that Alsatians needed to be provided with a standard language, that of the sovereign state. While the dialect is tolerated as a local curiosity in times of peace, it becomes a liability in times of tension between France and Germany, since speaking the dialect is then likely to be equated with being pro-German. Politicizing the language issue, presenting linguistic assimilation to Alsatians as the natural consequence of their being French citizens, has prevented the language problem from being dealt with objectively as a linguistic problem, and has thwarted attempts by Alsatians to redefine the function of the dialect and further its growth. From the standpoint of the French authorities, one standard language only is both sufficient and desirable, that of the state.

Both French and German principles underlying language policies have aimed at uniformity, and reduction, if not elimination of local particularism. The characterization of linguistic pressure as defined by Haugen (1950b)274,279) is relevant to the Alsatian situation: "linguistic pressure

is a special type of social pressure which operates to produce linguistic conformity... such pressure goes beyond the requirements of mere understanding, involving... a requirement of identity and identification". The Jacobin principle of the 1789 French revolution, "the language of a free nation must be one and the same for all", is still in force. Following World War I and World War 2, the goals of the French language policies were to achieve assimilation and centralization. The German attitude before World War I was basically that the neglect of French would eliminate French. During World War 2 under the Hitler regime, language policies aimed at eliminating everything French, to achieve total assimilation, as illustrated by the then widespread slogans: "Entwelschen, gleichgestalten", and "Hinaus mit dem welschen Plunder".[4] Regardless of whether Alsace is under a French or a German regime, the same notion prevails, namely that French and German are mutually exclusive.

Except for the Nazi period in Alsace, when language policies attempted to eliminate French borrowings in the dialect, such as greetings and names, language policies have dealt directly with the dialect. The focus has instead been on the implementation and expansion of the official language. Both French and German policies imposed the exclusive use of the official language as a means of instruction on all levels of education, in administration, in judicial procedures, in the military, in all official matters.

After World War I, it is estimated that only 2% of the population in Alsace was fluent in French, and that 8% had a limited knowledge of it (Maugué 1970:47). France faced then two major problems in Alsace: a legislative problem, that of implementing in Alsace legislation established in France between 1871 and 1918 regarding the strict separation of State and Church, the secularization of education, increased centralization, and instituting French as sole official language in administration and education. The exclusive use of French in law courts, government assemblies, and education created a number of problems and led to disenchantment on the part of the local population. Translators were needed for all official deliberations and for record keeping. In order to implement French as sole means of instruction, French teachers were required. This meant a systematic retraining of many Alsatian teachers and assigning monolingual French teachers to Alsatian schools. The latter were offered a 16% salary increment (law of July 22, 1923 cited in Das Elsass IV 1936: 421) because of the "hardship" language situation in Alsace. In elementary and pre-school education the direct method was used, which then required the exclusive use of French. German was taught as a foreign language from the fourth grade on. In order not to antagonize Alsatians even more, the French authorities did not insist on carrying out the legislation pertaining to secularization. Alsace, therefore, continued (and still continues) to offer religious instruction in public schools under the provisions of the Concordat (1802) and the Falloux law (1850) (Philipps 1975:356). Under popular pressure additional concessions were made, and German (decret Poincaré-Pfister Aug. 30, 1927) taught from the second half of the second school year (Falch 1973:68).

During World War 2 under the Hitler regime, language policies aimed at total eradication of French were carried out and involved forbidding the use of French even when it occurred in French borrowings in the dialect, and instituting a system of fines for infractions. Thus, in the early 1940s, when Alsatians were caught using "bonjour" for a greeting, they were fined three Marks, so the new greeting became "three Marks, my friends" (Bopp 1945:77). While English and other European languages were taught in high school, French was not offered. All French signs in public places (street names, store signs, inscriptions on monuments...) were replaced by German ones. (That was carried out so systematically that faucets were labeled kalt and heiss and salt and pepper shakers Salz and Pfeffer. People were compelled to replace French-sounding names by German ones. French books were collected and publicly burned, and listening to French broadcasts became a criminal offense.

In reaction to such drastic measures, Alsatians after World War 2 were unanimously opposed to anything that reminded them of the German presence. Thus, they were willing to accept a total reversal of the language situation, instituting exclusive usage of French in all official matters, and numerous restrictions on the usage of German, such as allowing bilingual newspapers only with the provision that 25% of their content be written in French (titles, advertisements, sport sections, articles aimed at youth, birth and death announcements) (Ordinance of Sept. 13, 1945, law of March 1, 1951, cited by Falch 1973:71). German was not allowed any priority status within the educational system, and was taught on the secondary level like any other foreign language.

New developments have occurred since WW2 which challenge the validity of these policies. In 1951 the Deixonne law was instituted in France aiming at the protection of the dialects in France and legislating their inclusion as an optional subject of study in the curricula of public schools (Falch 1973:67). That law, while pertaining to Occitan, Basque, Catalan, and Breton, does not apply to Alsatian. Under public pressure optional instruction in German was introduced in the last two years of elementary schools in 1952 (Falch 1973:69). However, families have to request it formally for their children. In 1963, German instruction (2 hours a week) became an integral part of the public school curriculum in the last three elementary grades. Between 1966 and 1967, from 80% to 90% of parents requested German instruction for their children. A survey made in 1967 indicates that 70% to 75% of the students in secondary schools chose German as their first foreign language.

While the priority of French is not questioned, there is an increasing demand for bilingual education, which in turn affects the status of the dialect. I will explore some of the most recent trends in the final part of this study.

Resulting Dialect Change

Subject to language policies aimed at producing linguistic assimilation, the Alsatian dialect has assumed an increasingly reduced function, being used only in informal, everyday situations. Through lack of

standardization, and through the fact that it is unrelated to the official French language, it has become more and more diversified, and has increasingly evolved into a variety of closely related dialect variants. More recently, it has been undergoing processes of simplification and impoverishment. One of the major characteristics of dialect change affecting Alsatian over the years, is the large number of French borrowings incorporated into the dialect through prolonged contact with French. "Contact breeds imitation and imitation breeds linguistic convergence" (André Martinet in Weinreich 1968:viii). It is significant, of course, that the direction of the borrowings has been from French to Alsatian, and not vice versa. This is consistent with Bloomfield's observation that within the context of intimate borrowing, the lower language borrows predominantly from the upper; "if the lower language survives, it bears the mark of the struggle in the shape of copious borrowings" (Bloomfield 1933:464). Borrowings in Alsatian have not only been facilitated by the dominance of French, but also by the lack of standardization of the dialect. "The realization that one's mother-tongue is not a standardized language applicable in all types of formalized communication (government activities, literature, radio, school, etc.) often makes people indifferent to interference in it" (Weinreich 1968:88).

There seem to be three main domains in which borrowings have taken place in Alsatian. Through historical events such as wars and the spread of the Catholic religion, military terms (ranks, war objects, profanities) and ecclesiastical terms (designation of clergy, saints, names which came to be adopted as given names) were incorporated into the dialect. A second domain is related to the dominance of French as expressed through deliberate language policies and daily exposure to French. Borrowings here pertain to education (subject matter, educational institutions, personnel, objects used in schools), administration, government agencies, terms pertaining to the law, greetings, kinship terminology, and health related expressions. Finally, there is the domain related to prestige areas of French culture, as perceived by Alsatians. These include etiquette (formulas of politeness), social standing (housing, vehicles, higher ranking professions), cuisine and clothing.

Some examples of borrowed items in Alsatian follow:

A:	[bɔ̊ʀ̊dmone]	'billfold'	from	F: [pɔʀtmɔne]	(porte-monnaie)
A:	[b̥ɔʀə̊bli]	'umbrella'	from	F: [paʀaplɥi]	(parapluie)
A:	[g̊omi̊fo]	'proper'	from	F: [kɔmilfo]	(comme il faut)

Whether one can speak of phonological borrowings in Alsatian is questionable. There is no clear-cut voicing contrast in Alsatian. Stops are realized as voiceless lenis stops in initial and medial position, and as voiceless fortis stops in morpheme final position. In my phonetic transcriptions I represent voiceless lenis stops as devoiced voiced stops [b̥, d̥, g̊] to indicate that they differ from morpheme final stops [p,t,k] and also to show that they differ from French stops in borrowings (see chart on following page). Alsatian also has a limited number of

Consonants

		bilabial	dent./alv.	alv.-pal.	palatal	velar	labio-vel.	uvular	laryng.
Stops	F	p b	t d			k g			
	A	p^h (1) p (2)	t^h (1) t (2)			k^h (1) k (2)			
Fricatives	F	f v	s z	š ž					
	A	f v (3)	s ◯	š ◯		x [ɣ]			h
Nasals	F	m	n		ɲ	ŋ			
	A	m	n			ŋ			
Liquids	F		l					ʀ	
	A		l					ʀ	
Glides	F				j		w		
	A				j		w		

(1) word initial position only.
(2) lax in initial and medial position, tense in final position.
(3) realized as a lax F.

Vowels

French:

i	y	u	ɛ̃	(œ̃)
e	ø	o	ɑ̃	
ɛ	œ^{ə}	ɔ	ɔ̃	
a	ɑ			

Alsatian:

i	y	◯
ɪ	ʏ	ɒ
e	[ø]$_{ə}$	o
ɛ	◯	◯
a		ɒ

initial aspirated bilabial and velar stops in prevocalic position, but few occurrences of an initial dental aspirated stop. The latter is present only in French borrowings where the corresponding French dental stop is unaspirated.

A: [t^h s]	'cup'	from F: [tas]	(tasse)
A: [t^homɒt]	'tomato'	from F: [tomat]	(tomate)
A: [p^hɒ: ʀ]	'pair'		
A: [k^hɛʀn]	'pit'		

It seems then that the incorporation of initial tense /t^h/ has filled an empty slot in the stop series in Alsatian, with aspiration occurring on the analogy of existing /p^h/ and /k^h/. /t^h/, however, occurs only in a limited number of French borrowings and has not been

incorporated in any indigenous word. I therefore consider the incorporation of /tʰ/ as part of the lexical borrowings in which it occurs, not as phonological borrowing.

Borrowings from French are subject to various changes; they adapt to the Alsatian sound system and fit into Alsatian morphological patterns and Alsatian syntactic structures. This has been found to be true of borrowings in general, as Weinreich stated (1968:44): "A word which has been transferred from one language into another is itself subject to the interference of the grammatical, as well as the phonic system of the recipient language".

Alsatian applies phonemic substitution to French borrowings. The empty slots for /u/, /ɔ/ and /œ/ in the Alsatian vowel chart and /z/ and /ž/ in the Alsatian consonant chart, are not filled with borrowings from French, but instead Alsatian substitutes a native phoneme for these when they occur in borrowed words, as illustrated below.

	Alsatian:		French:	
u → y	[byši]	'candle'	[buži]	(bougie)
ɔ → o	[bon]	'maid'	[bɔn]	(bonne)
ø → e	[ɒdje]	'good bye'	[adjø]	(adieu)
œ → ø	[šoføʀ]	'chauffeur'	[šofœʀ]	(chauffeur)
a → ɒ	[tʰɒs]	'cup'	[tas]	(tasse)
p → b	[bɒbə]	'father'	[papa]	(papa)
t → d	[dɒndə]	'aunt'	[tɔ̃t]	(tante)
k → g	[gaʀdje]	'neighborhood'	[kaʀtje]	(quartier)
ž → š	[blyš]	'blouse'	[bluz]	(blouse)
ž → s	[byšl]	'candle'	[buži]	(bougie)

French nasal vowels are denasalized in Alsatian:

ɔ̃ → {ɒ:, ɒn}	[ɒ:dʀe] [ɒndʀe]	'come in'	[ɔ̃tʀe]	(entrez)
ɔ̃ → {ɑ:, ɑm}	[bɑ:bje] [bɑmbje]	'fireman'	[pɔ̃pje]	(pompier)
ɛ̃ → ɛ:	[ɛ:šənjøʀ]	'engineer'	[ɛ̃žənjœʀ]	(ingenieur)

Alsatian incorporates many French words in compounds, forming hybrid terms in which one componentis a French borrowing, the other indigenous.

[dʀ kʰydlɛtgnoɣə] 'the bone of a cutlet'
from F: [kotlɛt] (cotelette)
and A: [gnoɣə] 'bone'

There are also instances of pleonasms. Thus the French [vɛ:šo] (vin chaud), a hot spiced wine usually enjoyed on New Year's Eve becomes:

[hajsəʀ vɛ̃:šo vin] 'hot 'wine hot' wine'

Contractions of nominal expressions are frequent:

[nɔ̃dədje]	a profanity	[nɔ dø djø] (nom de Dieu)
[mɑ̃mse l]	'young lady'	[madmwazɛl] (mademoiselle)

Loss of morphological boundaries may also occur, creating patterns of agglutination:

[dʀ+lɔbe]	'the 'the priest''
	from F: [l+abe] (the priest)

There are also a few instances of partial loan translation:

A:	[brɔ̃sblɯ:m]	(pissing+flower)	'dandelion'
F:	[pisãli]	(piss+in+bed)	'dandelion'

However, in the above example, French 'pissenlit' has also become a direct borrowing [bisɒli], and the loan translation is now perceived as a vulgar expression, whereas the direct borrowing is standard.

There are no instances of transfer of French inflectional and derivational morphemes into Alsatian. This seems to confirm Meillet's statement that "the grammatical systems of two languages are impenetrable to each other" and Weinreich's assertion that 'the transfer of morphemes which are as strongly bound as inflectional endings in many European languages seems to be extremely rare" (Weinreich 1968:31). Grammatically, then, the borrowed forms are subjected to the system of Alsatian, both as to syntax and as to the indispensable inflections.

Examples:

Plural formation: Vowel fronting (in the case of a back vowel)[5] + unrounding [-əʀ]

A:	[ə bly:s]	'a blouse'	F: [yn bluz] (une blouse)
A:	[blɪ̊:səʀ]	'blouses'	F: [de bluz] (des blouses)

Diminutive affixation: [-əl], [-ələ] 'small, very small or cute'

A:	[ə bly:s]	'a blouse'
	[ə blɪ̊:səl]	'a small blouse'
	[ə blɪ̊:sələ]	'a very small (or cute) blouse'

A:	[nɔ̃dəbɪb̥]	a profanity F:[nɔ̃ dyn pip] (nom d'une pipe)
	[nɔ̃dəbɪb̥əl]	3 degrees
	[nɔ̃dəb̥ɪb̥ələ]	of intensity

Verb forms:

Suffixation of infinitive marker [-ɪ:ʀə]

A:	[šwɒsɪ:ʀə]	'to choose'	F: [šwaziʀ] (choisir)

Tense inflection: person/number marker; addition of Alsatian subject/object pronouns:

A: [dy šwɒsɪ:ʀ+š s] 'you choose it'
(2sg.sgj verb+2sg 3sg.obj)

as contrasted with French:

[ty lø šwazi] (tu le choisis)
(2sg.sbj 3sg.obj verb+2sg)

A: [mʀ ekskysɪ:ʀə ɑns] 'we apologize (we excuse ourselves)'
(1pl.sjb verb+pl 1pl.obj)

as contrasted with French:

[nu nuz ɛkskyzɔ̃] (nous nous excusons)
(1pl.sbj 1pl.obj verb+1pl)

Compound tense construction: borrowed verbs take indigenous auxiliary:

A. [dy heš miš ɒmbədɪ:ʀt] 'you have bothered me'
(2sg.sbj aux 1sg.obj verb.PP)

as contrasted with French:

[ty ma ɔ̃:bɛte] (tu m'as embêté)
(2sg.sbj 1sg.obj aux verb.PP)

Comparative and superlative constructions: [-əʀ], [-šdə]

A: [šik] 'elegant'
[šik+əʀ] 'more elegant'
[ɒm šikšdə] 'the most elegant'

as contrasted with French:

[šik] (chic)
[ply šik] (plus chic)
[lø ply šik] (le plus chic)

Possessive constructions: Borrowed words are incorporated into the Alsatian syntactic structure which differs widely from the French possessive formation:

a: [ɪn də mɒdɒm ɪ:ʀə bɒrebli] 'the lady's umbrella'
(to the lady her umbrella)

as contrasted with French:

[lø paʀaplɥi dø la dam]
(the umbrella of the lady)

A: [ɪm sysan sin bli:səl] 'Susan's little blouse'
(to the[6] Susan her blouse+diminutive)

as contrasted with French:

[la ptit bluz dø sysanj (la petite blouse de Suzanne)
(the little blouse of Susan)

There are also a number of semantic changes occurring in French borrowings:
extensions, in which the number of things a word may refer to is greater in Alsatian:

A: [d bydik] 'the workshop, the mess'
F: [la butik] 'the shop'
(la boutique)

narrowings, in which words have a more limited range of meaning in Alsatian:

A: [d bladfoʀm] 'the main platform of the medieval cathedral in Strasbourg (a tourist attraction)'
F: [la platfɔʀm] 'the platform'

semantic shifts, in which already existing words acquire a new meaning:

A: [gʀɔmbo:l] 'loud noise'
[gʀɔmbo:l mɔʀe] 'to make a lot of noise'
F: [fɛʀ la karãbɔl] 'make-the-carambole= play an XVIIIth
(faire la carambole) century marble game'

Towards A Redefinition of the Role of the Dialect

Within the context of the recent general trend toward regionalism in France, there is a new emphasis on traditional Volkskultur. The creation in 1976 of an official "Institut des arts et traditions populaires d'Alsace" is a case in point. However, the interpretations as to the motivations underlying the creation of that institute and the function it is supposed to assume, vary widely. There seems to be agreement, however, on the notion that total assimilation of Alsace will mean an impoverishment of France, as it excludes diversity without increasing unity. In this spirit, the Holderith reform was instituted in 1972, which set up a limited German program (1/2 hour daily) in the last two grades in elementary

school. The method used is unique in that it assumes prior knowledge of Alsatian. In favor of the expansion of dialect usage and bilingualism are also the availability of German and Swiss television broadcasts in standard German and in German dialects, an increasing number of commuters (Alsatians working across the border in Germany, Germans coming to work in Alsace), and an expansion of the German economy into Alsace. Against the maintenance of the dialect is French centralism, which permits only one official language in a rigidly controlled educational system, in the administration, the army, the media; and the emergence of an intensely Frenchified younger generation, who no longer have easy access to the written expression of the dialect.

More recently the language problem has also become a political issue ("Jean" 1977). Protest movements and various organizations aiming at defending the rights of minority languages have sprung up. They reject both the politics of assimilation of the French government and the identification with German nationalism and German culture. Their demands aim at official recognition of Alsatian, increased use of the dialect in the professions and the media, bilingual education at all levels of instruction, and inclusion of local history in the curriculum. Such aspirations may not be shared by the whole Alsatian population, and the demands are unlikely to be met by the French government. They are, however, indicative of new factors which seem to be working against the further decline of the dialect.

Ideally, Alsace could be an area of transition, a link between French and German cultures, a function which has often been assigned verbally to the province, but has never become a reality. The Alsatian dialect with its Germanic structure and the incorporation of French borrowings could serve advantageously as a starting point in implementing bilingualism. Meanwhile it simply remains a symbol of ethnic identity.

FOOTNOTES

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2 Between two chairs I was born
I wasn't asked for my opinion
Between two chairs I have been sitting for years now
gazing at the emptiness around me.

3 A linguistic minority is any population group which traditionally has been living in a given area, and uses a dialect or a language other than the official language or languages of the state.

4 De-Frenchify! Conform! Out with the French trash!

5 I do not have any examples of borrowings from French in which the back vowel occurs, but vowel fronting + unrounding is the rule in this type of Alsatian plural formation: [lox] 'hole' [lesɐʀ] 'holes'.

6 In Alsatian names take the definite article.

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